

CRITICAL DIGEST

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Theatre Diary

Red Rainbow-Royale 9/14/53. Bruce Fagan presents a new play by his father Myron C Fagan about Communism in NYC. Cast includes Howard Smith, Fred Irving Lewis and Effie Afton, directed by author...End As A Man-Theatre de Lys 9/15. Claire Heller presents Calder Willingham's dramatization of his own novel about a Southern military academy. Cast includes Ben Gazzara, Frank Thomas Sr, and William Smithers. Directed by Jack Garfein...A Pin To See The Peep Show- Playhouse 9/17/53. Nancy Davids presents a mystery play by E.M. Harwood and F. Tennyson Jesse, based on an actual English case. Marks US debut of English actress-director team of Joan Miller and Peter Cotes.

Current Theatre Reviews

Anna Russell and Her Little Show-Vanderbilt 9/1/53. First opening of the 1953-54 theatre season received a slight majority of mild notices from the NY daily drama critics. Presented by Eastman Boomer and Arthur Klein it present the "concert comedian" on Broadway for the first time. "Pro" side was headed by Chapman, News, who gave his full approval to the singer who combines the pointed and delicate art of satire with the broad lusty art of burlesque. 5 other critics complimented the talents of the star in a mild manner, but they each voiced criticisms of the presentation. Atkinson, Times, enjoyed the first half of the show, fearing the second half settles down to a test of strength and endurance. Coleman, Mirror, a Russell fan since her first NY Town Hall "concert" blamed the producers for underestimating the intelligence and taste of the Russell fans by leaving out some of her best numbers. While Sheaffer, Eagle, noted that her repetition and continual exaggeration of her comedy mannerisms become monotonous. Dash, Woman's Wear, marked it as a better than average "vaudeville" show. Critics of the 3 NY evening papers, Watts, Post, McClain, Journal American, and Hawkins, World Telegram & Sun agreed with Kerr, Herald Tribune, that inspite of the star's obvious talents and energy the result is not as amusing as it should be. Most compared her unfavorably with Beatrice Lillie and Gracie Fields.

Carnival in Flanders-Century 9/8/53-9/12/53. \$331,000 is the estimated cost of the season's first flop which played 6 performances and closed. NY daily critics were unanimous in their panning of the lavish musical based on the French film classic of the same name. Though stars Dolores Gray and John Raitt shared top adjectives with the technical efforts of sets by Oliver Smith, costumes by Lucinda Ballard, and dance direction by Helen Tamiris, the critics found slight merit in cumbersome book credited to show's director Preston Sturges. Atkinson, Times, believes the fore mentioned all deserve jobs in worthwhile shows, while he rated Sturges book as laborious and banal. Scattered, lumbering and dispirited bore, adds Kerr, Herald Tribune. Chapman, News, agreed show was beautiful to see, but neither Sturges book or music by Johnny Burke and Jimmy Van Heusen amount to much. Hawkins, WT&S, reported that the book sounds like a review of all the most familiar jokes ever told, the result confusing when not boring.. McClain, Journal American, pointed out that among other things the show lacked a comedy role. Dull and cluttered stage production, sums up Cooke, Wall S t. Journal, whose book, music and lyrics are stuffed with cliches.

Hits Revisited

Second viewing of Hazel Flagg by Hobe, Variety found show's original vitality missing, and its basic limitations more obvious. Helen Gallagher has improved slightly but she still doesn't rate as a star of a musical comedy. Tony Bavaar is an improvement, though mugg notes Jack Whiting has unfortunately embroidered his show stopping.

' Off Broadway '

Charlotte Knight will stage Late Arrival, Charles Oxtan's new play, which will open the season of the Blackfriars' on Oct 19.

2 mild pro notices filed for The World of Sholom Aleichem, presented by Rachel Productions for a limited 7 week run at the Barbizon Plaza. The 3 short plays originally was presented in May with the same cast. Atkinson, Times, rated the 3 little plays in English that Arnold Perl has translated as original and beautiful, and dacted with remarkable sensitivity. The middle play Bontche Schweig was considered the masterpiece of the evening by the Times man, a sort of Yiddish "Green Pastures." Kerr, Herald Tribune, was more impressed by the 3 fine acting jobs turned in by Morris Carnovsky, Jack Gilford and Howard da Silva, than he was by the scripts. Both critics, though recommending the production, noted that it was uneven.

' ATW Awards '

Scholarships for a year's study in the American Theatre Wing Professional Training program were presented by Helen Hayes to the 4 winners among the 160 applicants. Constance Simons, Willmansett, Mass, received the Mary MacArthur Scholarship donated by Miss Hayes in memory of her daughter Mary MacArthur. Eileen Letchworth, Library, Pa won the faculty scholarship in theatre, Rosalind Elias, Lowell, Mass, the music scholarship, and Ed Roll, Cincinnati, Ohio, won the dance scholarship.

' Vaudeville '

Palace current bill features Dangenham Girl Pipers making their US vaude debut. Also Tommy Hanlon, Jr, Billy Shepard, 3 Royal Rockets and Bernadette Phelan Dancers.

"Kol Nidrei", traditional song of the Jewish New Year, has been added to the current stage show at Radio City Music Hall.

' Strawhat Fivale '

The Trip To Bountiful, the Fred Coe production of Horton Foote's new play, adapted from an NBC "Television Playhouse" presentation, debuted at Westport, Conn, Country Playhouse.

2 critics praised it highly, Dash, Women's Wear and Elem, Variety. While the trade reporter noted thin spots in the transition, plus 2 wasted scenes at the script's start, he did praise its integrity in writing, the dialogue that register sharply, smart direction and performances of the best Broadway quality.

Dash found it a tersely realistic play recommended to everyone. Lillian Gish offers one of the most sensitive, luminous and touching portrayals of her career, the critic raved. He also felt play, with slight pruning, could be one of the most memorable plays of the season. The Theatre Guild is considering presenting it as its first play this season.

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 ' Green Room Department '

PRESS AGENTS PANNED... Too many high-paid theatre press agents are lazy, McHarry, News, charges. He based this conclusion on a trio of incidents where he as a drama reporter couldn't find the theatre press agents in their offices to give him the required data. McHarry admits however that there are a number of hard working agents who seem dedicated to making a newspaper man's life as uncomplicated as possible. They keep reasonable office hours, call you occasionally and frequently provide stories above the routine. But the other type of publicity men were advised to let him know how they are now and then. And if they can't stay out of those pools come summer, they should hire some one to answer office phone.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS... Patrons who attend Hazel Flagg and don't enjoy the musical can get their money back from Jule Styne, the producer told WMCA Maxine Keith... One of the great ovations of the year will be given when Basil Rathbone comes onstage in Bill Doll's production of Sherlock Holmes, predicts Morehouse, World Telegram & Sun... Reviews by Kerr, Herald Tribune, prove that it is possible for a local reviewer to be vivid and interesting in writing of performances, praises Watts, Post.

AIR COOLED SURVEY... NY's record breaking heat wave apparently overcame the air cooling systems of most Broadway theatres, Variety reports. Trade paper noted that in its survey most of the complaints by patrons were filed against Shubert playhouses. Most of their houses use ice and blower systems, rather than the modern chemical setups.

TALENT TIPS... While it is true the theatre is in great need of new playwrights, it is equally true that help is required from the eminent veterans, many who have not been represented on Broadway for years, comments Watts, Post... Gaye Jordan, who has just finished her 4th season at Berkshire Playhouse is a young actress that NY will be hearing from, predicts Morehouse WT&S.

MORE CON "MAIN"... The film "Main Street to Broadway", which will turn over part of its profit to the Council of the Living Theatre, will certainly set an all time record for negative notices filed before the picture opens in NY. George Jean Nathan and the Newsweek film critic are the latest to join the pan-wagon. The former rated it a painful Class C botch which will probably discourage theatre attendance. While the news magazine bills it as an ambitious soufflé that falls flat on its pancake.

INTERVIEW HI-LITES... Summer theatres can operate profitably without big names in the cast, Mary Winslow, producer of the Chatham, Mass Monomoy Theatre told Hawkins, WT&S. But it was a long haul. Her audiences, like most summer theatre fans, enjoy the lighter type shows. Each season is planned to include those shows the audience wants to see and those the producers know they will enjoy.

 ' Pros & Cons by TMK '

Vitamin filled Anna Russell presents a devastating musical satire of the 20th century in Anna Russell and Her Little Show. Critics unfairly compared her to Beatrice Lillie and Gracie Fields. It would be fairer to bill her as a female blend of Victor Borge-Abe Burrows and Spike Jones.

Beautiful sets and costumes, talented Dolores Gray and John Raitt and standout dancer Matt Maddox provide a pleasant evening of musical theatre at Carnival in Flanders. Purists and critics may also want a funny book and hit songs. But both groups must realize they can't have everything.

' NYC Theatre News Round Up '

A major complaint of NY theatre fans has always been that the seats in most of the Broadway showshops are uncomfortable. As one answer to this problem "orchestra divans" are being installed in the first 6 rows of the Coronet Theatre. The Little Hut, Andre Rousin's play adapted by Nancy Mitford will be presented at this theatre by John C Wilson on October 7. The upholstered armchairs will be retained after the run of the show if they prove successful. They will be scaled at \$6 per seat, while the remainder of the orchestra will be scaled at \$4.80 per seat.

Plays

December 3 has been set as the opening date at the Imperial Theatre for John Murray Anderson's Almanac. The house's current tenant Wish You Were Here departs, swimming pool and all, on November 28 for a Chicago run...Jose Ferrer, who has just added music publishing to his list of enterprises, may start his City Center program of 3 plays earlier than the announced December 11 date...The Prescott Proposals, the new Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse play which will star Katharine Cornell will open at the Broadhurst the week of December 13.

People

Robert Anderson, author of the forthcoming Playwrights Company production Tea and Sympathy, has been elected to membership in the organization...Lilo, Can-Can, was out of the cast for several days due to a throat ailment. Shelia Arnold subbed... Dolores Gray was stricken with laryngitis after the opening night of Carnival in Flanders, and the Wed. matinee was cancelled...British producer Henry Sherek is on his way to NY from London to ask the Council of Actors Equity to waive its 60-40 quota of American actors to British actors in any imported production. The producer would like to bring over intact his company now playing in T.S. Eliot's The Confidential Clerk.

Theatre Radio Notes

WNYC "Theatre Seminar" heard Sunday afternoons at 3 00 PM will play tape recordings of theatre lectures given at a recent American Academy of Dramatic Arts seminar. Speakers and topics include: Eva Le Gallienne on "Acting Shakespeare", Lawrence Langer on "The Classic Revival of Shakespeare in America," John Burrell on "The Producing and directing of Shakespeare," Therese Helburn "Understanding Shakespeare," Maurice Evans on "Shakespeare the Master Craftsman", Margaret Webster on "The Genius of Shakespeare", Howard Lindsay on "Direction: Analysis of Script," Sidney Kingsley on "The Director and the Actor."

Theatre TV Notes

"Life With Father" series will be produced from Hollywood instead of NY by CBS* TV starting in November. The leads have not been chosen yet, though Dennis King and Martha Scott played Mr and Mrs Day in the TV pilot film...NBC TV will feature a 90 minute telecast of a Shakespeare play with Maurice Evans in the lead later this fall ...Celeste Holm's TV film series "Carolyn" is still hunting for a sponsor.

Theatre Record Notes

"Henry VIII" has been recorded by London Records with Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson...The Ethel Merman-Mary Martin duet, seen on the NBC-CBS TV "Ford 50th Anniversary Show" has been recorded by Decca and will be released in late September.

